

**10875 Great Wolf Planning Appeal  
Reason for Refusal 04  
EPR Design Report**

**08.09.2020**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This document summarises EPR Design's response to the Reasons for Refusal so far as they relate to design matters.
- 1.2 EPR Architects was appointed by Great Lakes UK Ltd to provide architectural services in connection with the Proposed Development. EPR is one of the leading hotel architects in the UK, with over 20 years' design experience in the hotel and hospitality industry across a range of brand and operator types, including larger scale resorts. EPR is therefore well-qualified with considerable expertise and experience in the production of a very high quality and contextual design for the development of the appeal site. Throughout the design evolution process, we worked alongside the development team, and the other expert consultants, to use that experience and expertise in developing the proposals and participating in pre-application discussions with CDC and wider stakeholders.
- 1.3 EPR's task was to bring forward a high quality and appropriate architectural response to the project brief, taking into consideration the constraints and opportunities of the appeal site, the inputs of other disciplines, feedback from the Local Planning Authority and third parties and our client. The output from this work has been the production of a set of architectural drawings and a Design and Access Statement to support the Planning Application.
- 1.4 In light of the refusal of the planning application, EPR has reviewed those reasons which relate to design matters and provides the following response in support of the appeal by way of expert evidence. The principal authors of this document are Nick Rayner and Adam Jones, with the following qualifications.
  - 1.5 Mr Nick Rayner BA(Hons) DipArch ARB RIBA
  - 1.6 Mr Adam Jones BA(Hons) BArch ARB RIBA

## **2. Reason for Refusal 04**

*The development proposed, by virtue of its considerable size, scale and massing and its location in the open countryside beyond the built limits of the village of Chesterton, along with its institutional appearance, incongruous design, and associated levels of activity including regular comings and goings, will cause significant urbanisation and unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area, including the rural setting of the village and the amenities enjoyed by users of the public right of way, and would fail to reinforce local distinctiveness. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies ESD13 and ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan (2011-2031) Part 1, Saved Policies C8 and C28 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.*

- 2.1 By way of preliminary observations, it should be noted that the Proposed Development is for the first Great Wolf Lodge in the UK. It is intended to provide a fantastic hospitality destination opportunity, offering a dynamic and unrivalled entertainment experience, with a variety of exciting attractions in one location bringing families together for a unique and fun leisure experience at a holiday destination in the UK (rather than abroad).
- 2.2 The architecture of the Proposed Development has evolved during the inception of the project in order both to fulfil the requirements of the functional brief but also to respect and respond appropriately to the local context. The final result is intended to deliver a sustainable, high quality architectural and placemaking scheme that is entirely appropriate to its location, setting, and wider local landscape, having regard to all aspects of its surrounding, including its proximity to the M40 motorway, the village of

Chesterton and the surrounding areas. The design has been influenced by an approach of ensuring a sensitive massing and articulation for the built form, whilst incorporating attractive and appealing routes through the site for both the public and guests in a landscape-driven design.

- 2.3 The appeal scheme was the result of almost a year of design development with a team of design consultants, including in particular the landscape architect, as well as a series of pre-application discussions with CDC, discussions with key local stakeholders, and two multiple-day public consultations. Careful consideration was given to the impact of the proposals on the local area in architectural terms, in respect of its appearance, layout, character and the routing of the Public Right of Way (PRoW). The design ethos was one of a landscape-led approach, where the existing and proposed landscape design strategy was integral to informing the built architectural response.
- 2.4 The proposed building design is heavily influenced by the local architectural vernacular in terms of materiality, character, and style. Effective and appropriate access to the site has been incorporated, and the internal site layout provides generous and safe routes for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians alike.
- 2.5 The architectural proposal is complemented by an exceptional landscape design proposal, which includes a publicly accessible nature trail with enhanced biodiversity, plant species, and soft landscape features which do not currently exist on the site.

### **3. Context and Character**

- 3.1 Turning to terms used in the Reason for Refusal, reference is made to context and character. The site is immediately adjacent the M40 motorway, bounded by this road and the A4095 to the north of the site. It is beyond the village of Chesterton, and north of Little Chesterton. The site currently accommodates the back nine holes of Bicester Golf Club and Spa. This is already a managed, rather than natural or agricultural landscape, with established vegetation around the perimeter. Immediately to the east of the site are the Bicester Golf Club and Spa buildings, and two private dwellings.
- 3.2 More generally, the surrounding area contains a network of arterial road routes connecting the various settlements and the M40, as well as leisure, retail, and commercial developments. These are generally situated on the outskirts of, or adjacent to, villages of varying sizes, and the town of Bicester. Unbuilt upon land in the area is predominantly designated for agricultural use.
- 3.3 The overall concept for the development of the site and the location of the building within it, was based on creating a richly layered landscape design within which the building will be sensitively located. Working with the existing peripheral vegetation, this creates a natural first layer of screening of the development. Within this, additional vegetation and soft landscape features are proposed as a result of work with the landscape architect. This will provide a second layer of screening of direct views of the building. The car park area will also be subject to its own detailed landscaping and it is deliberately positioned nearest the entrance to the site in order to assist in setting the building itself well away from the site entrance, deep into the planned area. Within this area set well within the site, the positioning of the various parts of the building has been chosen so as to orientate and locate the tallest and largest elements deep within the site, well away from any sensitive viewpoints. The effect of this strategy has been to ensure that at every point of the approach experience, the building is only eventually revealed once within the site, and only then through a series of screening layers and devices, responding sensitively to the local context. Further detail on this approach can be found in the Design and Access Statement (DAS).

### **4. Size, Scale and Massing**

- 4.1 Reference is made in reason for refusal 4 to the development's alleged "considerable size, scale and massing". Whilst the development necessarily involves 47,940sqm of gross internal floorspace disposed in buildings of between 14 and 22.5m in height, the size, scale and massing of the buildings are entirely appropriate to the form of development proposed and, more fundamentally, the area of land in question

within which the built form sits. The resort building is located very comfortably within the site with more than sufficient space around it to accommodate the size, scale and massing of the building itself.

- 4.2 The overall footprint of the resort building on the plan is that of a single building (as required for the functional brief for this type of leisure facility). In plan form, therefore, it is necessarily larger than (for example) buildings in Chesterton village. That is as one would expect it to be. In terms of actual appearance and perception, however, the size of the building is broken down by varying the proposed heights, giving the effect of making one building appear as a series of smaller buildings and representing an appropriate and contextual response to the existing smaller local built form density.
- 4.3 The height and massing of the building (including the taller elements) has also evolved considerably during the pre-application discussions. The final proposal represents a smaller building than that originally proposed. It has a well-articulated massing, appropriate both in principle for what is proposed, but also providing a high degree of architectural quality in the detailed design. Throughout this design process, particular attention has been given to understanding the area's built and natural context. The proposals respond to the traditional form, scale and massing of buildings in the area (as summarised below). Even though the building is not actually visible in relation to its neighbours in Chesterton (as demonstrated by the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)), the design of the building provides a respectful architectural response to the area's local character and is responsive to that context.
- 4.4 The height of the first of the three parts of the building (comprising the hotel guestroom wings) achieves a balance between the need for a certain height of building to accommodate these wings, with the overall scale of the development. Through the iterative design process with the landscape architect, and through pre-application discussions with CDC, a part three and part four storey hotel has been chosen which creates a balance between a building that is not too high but also one that is not too expansive on plan. The project brief for 498 guestrooms necessitates a building of a certain size. Through the design process we arrived at the optimum proportions for this element of the scheme. The local context is respected by delivering the height requirements by breaking down the building into two sub parts (one at three and one at four storeys). This will reduce the perceived massing. This part of the building also uses varying roof ridge and eaves heights, stepped facades in and out, with a variety of materials to break up the elevations, and correspondingly composed bays of fenestration. This has the visual effect of breaking up the building into several smaller elements. Further details on how this responds to the local north Oxfordshire vernacular are identified below.
- 4.5 The second part of the building is the water park element. The nature of this part of the building, with its water slide tower, is the anchor of the Great Wolf Lodge experience. It has been designed in conjunction with specialist consultants with international expertise. The slide tower is necessarily of a certain height in order to facilitate the use of the water slides. This represents a basic part of the brief and the leisure experience. This part of the building has been located deep into the site, surrounded by layers of screening, the success of which becomes clear when considered from viewpoints agreed with the local planning authority. The main water park area is a single volume space which accommodates the variety of leisure activities required in the brief (slides, rides, lazy rivers, toddler pools, wave machine). As the design has progressed, the team has focused on minimising any perceived experience of the size of the building. Studies showed that similar sized buildings in the area are typically of an agricultural typology, for example barns and stables. The proposed architecture for this building therefore follows that general typology in terms of the proposed massing, appearance, materiality and character. The result is a part of the scheme which sits comfortably in the surrounding landscape and responds positively to the setting and character of the area, albeit it is very well-screened in any event from any viewers outside the site.
- 4.6 The third part of the building is the Family Entertainment Centre (FEC) and conference centre. This element is single storey, but with a double height space. This lowest part of the development massing is designed to act as a separator between the two other necessarily larger parts of the development. With the help of the proposed landscaping strategy, sensitive plant services screening, and a large area of green (seeded) roof, this reinforces the appearance of two separate buildings (water park and hotel building) when viewed from further away.

- 4.7 The LVIA demonstrates that the building will not be visible from agreed viewpoints from Chesterton village. Accordingly, any perceived difference in size, scale or massing from buildings in Chesterton itself is not one which will be experienced from Chesterton or with buildings in Chesterton in view. The LVIA demonstrates the success of this approach and, in contradiction of the allegations made in the reason for refusal, that the design will not cause any material harm to the character of that area.
- 4.8 The overall effect of the size, scale and massing of the proposed architecture, by virtue of the conscious design choices made, is a building which does not appear as a single mass, but one which is broken down with a varied roofscape and massing. Nor does it create an urban characteristic, whether within the development site or in the surrounding area. It is not visually intrusive, nor harmful, it does not detract from the characteristics of the surrounding landscape. Further details on this can be found within the DAS and LVIA.

## **5. Location in the open countryside**

- 5.1 Reference is also made in the reason for refusal to the building being in open countryside. This allegation appears simply to rely upon a mechanistic approach to the site's location in countryside (albeit a golf course), without addressing the characteristics of the site which make it an ideal location for the Proposed Development, as can be seen from the results of the LVIA. It also ignores the basic point that any proposed development of this kind naturally has to be located in what is likely to be classed in policy terms as open countryside for a number of different reasons, but this fact does not equate to the creation of harm. In addition to the ideal nature of the location in terms of geographical requirements and a location which will make it easy to access (dealt with by others), if one simply concentrates on the location in design terms, and its effect on the countryside, it can be seen that the appeal site is particularly well-suited to accommodate the resort and the required buildings and land around it. It is located in a naturally well-concealed part of the "open countryside" which is already used for leisure purposes as a golf course. It has more than sufficient space to accommodate the footprint of the building within a generous landscaped setting. The nature of the site means visitors will be able to appreciate the buildings that make up part of the visitor experience within a countryside setting that is part of its attraction. At the same time, the Proposed Development is very well-screened, ensuring it will not have any wider undue visual intrusion on the open countryside or important natural features. Indeed, the inclusion of the publicly accessible nature trail with proposed enhanced biodiversity, illustrates the advantages that the site and its location has to offer for both visitors and the local community.
- 5.2 The site already has an established commercial leisure use, as a golf course. Although technically forming part of land classed as open countryside, it is a golf course. It is also located in close proximity to the edge of a growth settlement (Bicester). It is a privately owned and a managed landscape which has been altered to suit the golf club's requirements. Golf courses do not read in the same way as open countryside in terms of character and appearance. Moreover, the landscape design proposals for the Proposed Development will in fact create many elements of countryside within the development which are not currently present and which are able to be enjoyed by users of the site in a positive way, as compared with a golf course.
- 5.3 The Proposed Development, as a new hotel and resort, replaces part of the existing commercial golf course use. Owing to its location next to the M40, and as it is almost entirely shielded from view from places like Chesterton, the scheme therefore does not result in any "undue harm" to the open countryside. The Proposed Development appropriately respects the character of the countryside, as can be seen from the assessed effects set out in the LVIA. The secluded nature of the development also means that it has no impact on the local distinctiveness of the village or local area, as explained further below.

## **6. Beyond the Built Limits of the village of Chesterton**

- 6.1 Reference is made in the reason for refusal to the development site's location beyond the built limits of the village of Chesterton. The locational benefits of the appeal site in terms of sustainability are dealt with by others. However, from a design perspective, reference to the development site being beyond the built limits of Chesterton itself makes no sense as a criticism, or as a basis for a reason for refusal in

design terms. It is a virtue of the development Site that it lies close to, but outside the built limits of the village of Chesterton. It is ideally sited in such a location because it offers the benefits of connectivity at the same time as providing visual seclusion from Chesterton itself, using existing vegetation and landscape enhancements. This provides the ability to accommodate the proposed built form without having any material adverse impact on the village of Chesterton. The site is ideal in this respect in having the ability to conceal the building from the village, thus preventing any legitimate concerns of visual impact on the village, or any harm to the character of the village, along with the prevention of any perception of alleged urbanisation.

## **7. Alleged Institutional Appearance**

- 7.1 Reference is made in the reason for refusal to an alleged “institutional appearance” of the architectural proposal. We consider this to be an unjustified and inappropriate criticism. As noted above, the architectural proposal divides the building into three distinct parts, each with their own character, materiality, height, scale and massing. The connotation of some kind of rigid uniformity, or dull, drab appearance in terms of an “institutional” characteristic to the building is unjustified and unparticularised.
- 7.2 Some concerns were originally expressed during the pre-application discussions that the hotel guestroom part of the building, in its earlier design form, was too monolithic and repetitive in appearance. The design team responded to this criticism by introducing into the architectural proposal the varying roofscapes, changes in direction of the plan form, a range of roof ridge and eaves heights, a varied palette of materials, and fenestration composed in bays rather than uniformly separated.
- 7.3 A deliberately varied and strong architectural concept has been introduced and applied to give the building its own design integrity and interest. The criticism of an institutional appearance is unjustified. The design concept has been to create a hierarchy of three buildings assembled together, with a central “manor house” typology comprised in the tallest part of the building, where very high quality materials will be used, such as stone, to match that used in the local area. This will give this part of the building an enhanced articulation and a grander appearance. These elements are then flanked by shorter “residences” that have a similar appearance, but with slightly simpler detailing including exposed timber bracing, to give a more modest feel, coupled with a variety of façade materials. The residences are then themselves flanked by timber clad “stable” style architecture; these are shorter still, with hipped roofs, and other features associated with more agricultural buildings. The pairing of windows and the composition of the fenestration generally avoids any regimented or institutional appearance. The overall effect is that of a collection of buildings, situated symmetrically around a central focal point, with architectural variety but a harmonious common theme. Further details of this concept and illustrations of the design development process can be found in the DAS.

## **8. Alleged Incongruous Design**

- 8.1 There is an allegation in the reason for refusal that the design is “incongruous”. This criticism is not particularised. It is not clear with what the design is said to be incongruous. Nor is it clear from where this alleged incongruity would be appreciated. If it is a criticism made in respect of the design of buildings in the village, then it is misplaced because the design was developed specifically with the local architecture in mind. An honest approach to that design has been taken, where studies of buildings in Chesterton, Bicester, and surrounding regions have informed the architectural characteristics of the proposal. Window patterns, sizes and surrounds, façade materials, roof profiles, styles, proportions, height and scale were all taken into consideration and translated into an architectural composition that responded to these elements whilst not being unnecessarily fussy. The use of timber, render, and local stone as façade materials break up the elevations and reference the materials used on buildings within Chesterton, Bicester and the locality, along with steeply pitched roofs and gables with minimal overhangs.
- 8.2 As explained earlier the architecture of the proposal follows a strong conceptual narrative which ensures there is integrity to the scale of the building. This provides an authentic and cohesive design which has then been legitimately augmented by the references to local character and architectural style described.



- 8.3 For the water park building, as noted above, aside from the slides themselves (which are located away from agreed sensitive viewpoints) the local architectural vernacular of buildings of similar size and scale have been referenced, e.g. barns and other agricultural buildings, so that this part of the building will not be incongruous when viewed in the proposed setting.
- 8.4 The effect of other developments to be found outside settlements in the local area have been considered, e.g. the industrial complex outside of Little Chesterton, Bicester Avenue Garden Centre and Tesco Bicester. These are all significantly more visible than the Proposed Development. However, as a matter of principle it illustrates the fact that developments of a certain size are not inherently incongruous in terms of size, scale and massing.
- 8.5 As already noted, the LVIA demonstrates the minimal visual impact of the Proposed Development on the immediate context of Chesterton and beyond. Any allegation of incongruity needs to be understood in the context of what actual harm is said to arise, but this is not specified. Far from being incongruous in terms of design response, the architectural approach has been one of creating harmony with the locality, with consistent design characteristics used across the different elements of the scheme. Although the building will not be visible in the majority of instances, even where visible the architecture will present a sensitive and contextual response which is in keeping with the local vernacular of north Oxfordshire.

## **9. Levels of activity ('comings and goings')**

- 9.1 Reference is made to the levels of activities and the "comings and goings" associated with the use. The actual levels in question both in terms of the existing golf club use and their levels, are dealt with in more detail by the Appellant's traffic consultants. However, in terms of effect on the overall character of the area from a design perspective, the A4095 and surrounding arterial routes are already characterised by frequent "comings and goings". These roads serve their intended purpose to connect different settlements and amenities in the area. The additional traffic created by the Proposed Development will not alter this general characteristic. The scheme deliberately only proposes one access into the site for all modes of transport, thus minimising any effect on the surrounding roads. Vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians will all enter the site on the A4095, which is an entirely appropriate location for that road's designation. The anticipated levels of activity and the comings and goings are commensurate with the level of activity expected on an A road designation.
- 9.2 The location of the entrance along the A4095 has also been carefully selected to enable the delivery of required visibility splays, an acceptable relationship with the location of other nearby junctions, an acceptable relationship with other properties' entrances, the village of Chesterton and the motorway flyover. The location of the Proposed Development is outside of Chesterton village. Most comings and goings will also be outside of the village, so not capable of impacting on the overall character of the area. The Transport Assessment demonstrates that the proposed site access junction from the A4095 will operate within capacity with negligible queuing or vehicle delay.

## **10. Alleged "Significant Urbanisation"**

- 10.1 The reason for refusal alleges that the effects identified above will result in "significant urbanisation" but this criticism is not justified nor properly explained. In addition to the points already made, the concept of urbanisation is not applicable to what is proposed anyway.
- 10.2 The Proposed Development does not have the characteristics of urban development with consequential urbanising effects. It is not, for example, akin to a housing estate, retail park, or business park, where there are typically multiple separate buildings with multiple owners or tenants, in a variety of configurations and adjacencies, connected via a shared, usually public, network of infrastructure. These developments also often attract additional development to nearby surrounding areas to support these occupiers, such as shops, doctors' surgeries, and restaurants. This form of development can often result in urbanisation. The Proposed Development, by contrast, is self-supporting in this regard and

does not have any of those characteristics and it is set within its own very generous and well-designed landscaped setting.

- 10.3 Operationally and in terms of land use, the resort does not have the qualities, or feel, of an urban environment. It is centred around one building, owned and operated by one company but in a way which will have its own atmosphere as a leisure resort in a rural location set within an integral landscape that forms a fundamental part of the overall development. The resort will be managed to time arrivals, deliveries and collections as set out elsewhere in the application documentation. The pattern of activity is not continual as would be more likely to be the case in an urban environment, but rather characteristic of a leisure destination within the countryside.
- 10.4 Architecturally, the building has been massed and articulated to present itself as a series of buildings (water park, hotel, FEC), broken down into distinct bays with different characters as noted above. It has aspects of a campus environment in a countryside location with its own natural landscaping. It does not have characteristics associated with a city, town, or village, or any other urban or urbanising environment. The architecture is composed and symmetrical and the building functions as one entity, sited in a very generous landscape setting. The latter forms an important part of the overall environment. All of this is very much at odds with the characteristics of an urban environment. Contrary to what is alleged, neither the proposed building design, nor the overall Proposed Development, creates any harm to the character of the area in terms of alleged urbanisation.

## **11. Alleged “unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area”:**

- 11.1 The reason for refusal also contains an allegation of “unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area”. There is no substance to this. There is a detailed assessment of the effect of the proposal on the landscape character and appearance, as well as of any visual impacts in the LVIA. This demonstrates the absence of any material harm to the character and appearance of the area when properly analysed. The allegation is contradicted by the LVIA. The reason for refusal does refer to the “rural setting of the village” and amenities enjoyed by users of the PRow and “local distinctiveness”, but none of these references is a proper basis for criticism for any or all of the following reasons.

### Rural Setting of the Village

- 11.2 The site lies over 400m to the west of Chesterton village, with the eastern nine holes of the Bicester Golf Course lying between the village and the Site.
- 11.3 The eastern part of the village is designated as a Conservation Area and displays a rural character, as described in the Chesterton Conservation Area Appraisal (January 2008), with much of this part of the village dating before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. CDC correctly do not allege any harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 11.4 The western part of the village is undesignated - comprised of 20<sup>th</sup> Century infill development - that presents much more of a sub-urban character, with varying architectural style, materiality and extensive use of non-native ornamental planting to front and rear gardens. This character is in contrast to that of the adjacent Conservation Area; however, the degree of enclosure surrounding the village, combined with the extent of mature vegetation throughout the village, limits any degradation on areas that express a more rural character.
- 11.4 As described in the Conservation Area Appraisal, *“The village sits on relatively flat land. The area rises gradually from 70m in the south east to 80m in the north west. The result of this topography is that views out of the conservation area are few if any and that the area contains no sweeping panoramas.”*
- 11.5 This principle is evident on the north west side of the village and extends out into the surrounding landscape, where extensive vegetation on the eastern nine holes of the Bicester Golf Course and on

the southern half of Bignell Park (including the Chesterton Belt alongside the A4095) provide extensive separation between the village and the proposals.

- 11.6 The LVIA describes and represents (in photographic and other form) the extent of enclosure to the Site and well vegetated nature of the surrounding context. This substantially constrains the potential influence of the proposals, on all views and surrounding landscape character (including that of Chesterton Village) to that of the relatively immediate vicinity of the Site. As noted in the LVIA, there are no views from Chesterton village or any other settlements in the surrounding landscape.
- 11.7 The strong degree of enclosure to the Site was recognised by CDC, where their Landscape Officer noted *"Because the site is visually contained by boundary hedgerow and trees the development will be mainly experienced from the site's interior, from the perspective of visitors and visual receptors using the PRow"* noting also that *"the site has a low landscape sensitivity to change."*
- 11.8 Regarding the potential for any views from the direction of Chesterton village, a photograph was taken from the corner of the A4095 and The Hale (LVIA Viewpoint 5) and was overlaid with a wireline of the proposals (prepared independently by visualisation company Vista3D), to illustrate any likely visibility of the proposals from this closest edge of the village. This wireline is contained in LVIA Appendix 13.8 and shows that the nature of the local topography and significant extent of intervening vegetation would preclude any potential visibility of the scheme from the village, or any influence on its rural character.
- 11.9 The design proposal is not intended to be part of the village, but a well-designed, well-concealed countryside resort which is well-located close to Chesterton village, but without having any adverse effect on it.

#### Amenities enjoyed by the users of the Right of Way:

- 11.10 The reason for refusal appears to allege that the development will cause significant urbanisation of, and unacceptable harm to, the amenities enjoyed by the users of the Public Right of Way (PRoW). These contentions are not justified. On the contrary, the Proposed Development will actually provide an improved experience for users of the Right of Way (which is currently seldom used), as well as an additional publicly accessible nature trail.
- 11.11 The current route of the PRoW enters the Site on the southeast side, cuts directly across the golf course, and exits the Site on the A4095 near to the motorway flyover. The proposed new routing retains the entry point in its existing location, but then diverts the route along the eastern boundary of the Site, up to the A4095, where it then connects to a dedicated pedestrian and cycle route which continues on to the entrance of the Proposed Development, heading west. From here users continue a short distance alongside the A4095 to the previous exit point near the motorway flyover. Users can also choose to enter the Site at the main entrance and enjoy the benefits of the publicly accessible nature trail included within the proposals.
- 11.12 The re-directed route through the eastern part of the Site is proposed with a series of landscape features designed to enhance the user's experience and mitigate views of the Proposed Development, offering privacy, ease of movement, resting places, greater accessibility, a greater variety of vegetation species and biodiversity, all designed to grow naturally over time, and results in a dedicated route free from interference by other enterprises.
- 11.13 Moreover it has been demonstrated through survey work that there is a very small number of current users of this existing PRoW.
- 11.14 The allegation of unacceptable harm to users of the PROW is unjustified. Any impact experienced will be on a small number of people. But in any event, the proposed new routing will create a more suitable, better protected, more easily accessible, more enjoyable amenity than is currently provided. The current route requires users to walk through the golf course. This creates a direct conflict of use and presents certain health and safety risks to both PRow users and the golf club members, not to



mention nuisance for the latter. The development proposal will bring about positive benefits in this respect. The allegation also completely ignores the significant benefits that the Proposed Development brings with the publicly accessible nature trail included within the proposals as an additional amenity resource for the local community.

## **12. Local distinctiveness**

- 12.1 The reason for refusal alleges that the proposal development will “fail to reinforce local distinctiveness”. Again, this allegation is not particularised and unfounded. For the reasons explained above, the secluded nature of the Site and its landscape mean that the scheme is not generally visible in the context of the nearest settlement, Chesterton village, so it is difficult to see what criticism is being made. The scale of development will be imperceptible from Chesterton and therefore, in terms of appearance, ambience, environment, and the unique character and rarity of the village, the scheme does not adversely affect its local distinctiveness.
- 12.2 In so far as the Proposed Development will be seen (for example by users of the resort), the buildings have been designed to respond to the local vernacular and therefore to reinforce local distinctiveness in that regard.
- 12.3 As to open countryside generally, it has been demonstrated in the LVIA that the Proposed Development is largely not visible from agreed viewpoints. Where the building is visible (for example from the M40 and on the flyovers of the A4095 and Green Lane), these are dynamic views only experienced for a relatively short period of time by users of the strategic road network, where the building is only momentarily visible. When assessing the view of the water slides, slide tower and water park building from the M40, again the LVIA demonstrates in viewpoint 4 that the visible part of the building is minimal, and as this view is elevated from the M40, the view at motorway level would reduce visibility of the development even further. The architecture of the buildings has been designed to respond to the local vernacular anyway. Set against the experience of travelling along the M40 itself, there are other examples of developments which are far more obviously visible and draw attention. There is therefore no material impact on the local distinctiveness of the open countryside by the Proposed Development.
- 12.4 The area around Bicester and Chesterton is characterised by arterial traffic routes connecting to the M40, and to other leisure and retail destinations in and around Bicester. The Transport Assessment describes how the Proposed Development utilises these existing routes and thereby reinforcing this aspect of the local distinctiveness of the area.
- 12.5 In terms of the scheme’s scale and site arrangement (i.e. with outdoor car parking), there are similar examples (namely stand-alone retail operations) in and around the Bicester area, as noted earlier in this document. These are far more visually prominent than the Proposed Development. The scale of the proposal is consistent with the environment and ambience of this area.
- 12.6 As to the scheme’s architectural appearance, as noted above, the design draws inspiration heavily from the character and materials of locally distinctive buildings in the area. There is a significant use of local stone, which roots the development in its context. The undulating roofscapes provide variation to the height of the building reducing its bulk and mass and the changes in material and stepping of the facades distinguish different building elements, adding interest to the form whilst maintaining a unity of design and not being fussy in detail.
- 12.7 The Proposed Development does not detract from the local distinctiveness of the open countryside, Chesterton village, or the wider Bicester area, and is in fact in accordance with it in a number of different ways.

## **13. Conclusion**

- 13.1 The Proposed Development is intended to provide a fantastic hospitality destination, offering families a dynamic and unrivalled entertainment experience. It will provide a variety of exciting attractions in one location, bringing families together for a unique, fun experience in the UK (rather than travelling abroad).
- 13.2 The architectural response is intended to be of a very high quality, with very careful consideration given to a design that is landscape-led in approach. It has undergone an iterative design process, responding to the local context in all aspects, such as the size and scale of buildings in the surrounding area, drawing on local architecture and vernacular, responding to the setting in the open countryside, agreeing viewpoints and using existing topography and vegetation. The development proposals respond to the specific constraints and opportunities of the appeal site, deliver the required functional brief, whilst respecting the local character of its surroundings.
- 13.3 The proposed building uses a varied palette of high quality materials, profiles and styles, that will sit comfortably and contextually in the landscape, and will provide a robust and appropriate architectural narrative that reinforces local distinctiveness and is infused with local references.
- 13.4 Considerable care has been taken to adapt and enhance public amenity for the Site, based on a locally sensitive strategy for how the site is accessed, as well as providing landscape enhancements and additional public benefit through use and enjoyment of the site.
- 13.5 The Proposed Development will not therefore result in any of the adverse effects alleged in the reason for refusal, but rather deliver significant and substantial benefits.